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THE ENGLISH LEAFLET

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GEORGE H. BROWNE, PRESIDENT

F. W. C. HERSEY, SEC'Y AND TREAS.

CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS, EDITOR

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THE MARCH MEETING

THE EDITOR

Four hundred English teachers left the Lecture Hall of the Boston Public Library at one o'clock on Saturday, March 18th, enthusiastic in their praise of the sixteenth annual program of the New England Association of Teachers of English.

Professor Neilson of Harvard University gave a detailed report of the recent work of the National Conference on Uniform Requirements in English. He told us of the plan to arrange the English course to meet either the "Comprehensive" or the "Restricted" examination. The "Comprehensive" examination will not be based upon any particular list of books but will assume the completion of a carefully planned course in secondary-school English. The "Restricted" examination will be based upon a limited number of books now in process of selection. Each type of examination will provide an adequate test in composition and grammar. Fuller details concerning each of these examinations will later be published by the National Conference.

At the close of Professor Neilson's report President Browne introduced Mr. Robert Frost, the author of *North of Boston* and *A Boy's Will*. After reading a few of his poems Mr. Frost spoke at length on what he considered the most essential characteristic of poetry. This he conceives to be the tone of the sentence. Mr. Frost places comparatively slight stress upon visual imagery, and still slighter stress upon the appeals to odor, touch, or taste. If the sentence is so intoned as to make the correct imaginative appeal, the demands of poetic art are adequately met.

Mr. Frost says he cares nothing for alliteration or ono-

matopoeia or vowel or consonant effects. Tone appeal is not dependent upon such obvious devices but finds its proper base in the larger realm of imagination and theme-harmony. The properly phrased sentence secures its perfect harmony when tone and theme—in perfect balance—support and augment each other. As an instance of this the speaker quoted the opening lines of Tennyson's *Ulysses* where the tone and sense combine to produce the effect of extreme weariness.

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea.

In Mr. Frost's experience as a teacher of English he told us that he was always on the watchout for the boy's literary moment—the moment when thought and emotion found happy expression in the boy's theme. He lamented the fact that these moments are so extremely rare; and the fact that they are so rare lays upon the teacher the demand for expert watchfulness to detect the moment. There is the corresponding responsibility of encouraging the pupil who fortunately secures the artistic expression.

The closing address was given by Professor John Erskine, who chose for his theme *The Teaching of Poetry*. Professor Erskine was equally emphatic on the value of the literary moment, but in his analysis the literary moment was thought of as not merely the moment of creation but also as the moment of appreciation. To him it came first when in his father's edition of Tennyson he discovered his pulse-beat quicken as he read the closing lines of *Morte d'Arthur*.

One of the points that Professor Erskine most strongly stressed was the necessity of the reader's being a thorough student. It is not enough that we study *In Memoriam*; we must study also the authors whose works inspired Tennyson's great elegy. That portion of the poem which discusses the principles of evolution can be adequately understood only by those who acquaint themselves with the principles of evolution as enunciated by such scientists as Darwin and Huxley.

Professor Erskine in closing his address laid emphasis upon the necessity of a teacher of poetry having a deep and enthusiastic love of poetry. Without this depth and without this enthusiasm no real liking for poetry can be generated in those who are being taught. Intelligent enthusiasm in the teacher begets intelligent enthusiasm in the student. And in this way poetry may be taught.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The March meeting was one of the best attended meetings in the history of the Association.

The Lecture Room of the Boston Public Library is an ideal place for our meetings. We are deeply appreciative of the kindness of the trustees in offering us this room without charge.

The following are now the officers of our Association:

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Many teachers will be pleased to learn that owing to the large demand for copies of the March number of the *Leaflet—A New List of Theme Topics*—we are to issue a second edition. Orders have already been received for over

eleven hundred copies. Teachers can get these from Mr. Hersey at ten cents each.

The close of another year emphasizes again the debt which our Association owes to Mr. George H. Browne. In his office of president during the past year he has exhibited that same spirit of enthusiasm and devotion that characterized his long service as Editor-Secretary-Treasurer—a triple function splendidly performed. The Executive Committee will still call upon him for advice. We are wondering if our gifted president-elect, Mr. Alfred M. Hitchcock, can invent any device more memorable than Browne's climax in introducing our poet-guest—*Here Frost!* That was a literary moment, appropriately tone-colored.

In further illustration of Mr. Frost's theory of writing we have Mr. Browne's consent to use a stenographic report of a talk given by Mr. Frost at the Browne-Nichols School on May 10, 1915.

Mr. Browne has alluded to the seeing eye. I want to call your attention to the function of the imagining ear. Your attention is too often called to the poet with extraordinarily vivid sight, and with the faculty of choosing exceptionally telling words for the things he sees. But equally valuable, even for schoolboy themes, is the use of the ear for material for compositions. When you listen to a speaker, you hear words, to be sure,—but you also hear tones. The problem is to note them, to imagine them again, and to get them down in writing. But few of you probably ever thought of the possibility or of the necessity of doing this. You are generally told to distinguish simple, compound, and complex sentences,—long and short,—periodic and loose,—to varying sentence structure, etc. "Not all sentences are short, like those of Emerson, the writer of the best American prose. You must vary your sentences, like Stevenson, etc." All this is missing the vital element. I always had a dream of getting away from it, when I was teaching school,—and, in my own writing and teaching, of bringing in the *living* sounds of speech. For it is a fundamental fact that certain forms depend on the sound;—e. g., note the various tones of irony, acquiescence, doubt, etc., in the farmer's "I guess so." And the great problem is, can you get these tones down on paper? How *do* you tell the tone?—By the context, by the animating spirit of the living voice. And how many tones do you think there are flying round? Hundreds of them—hundreds never brought to book. Compare T. E. Brown's *To a Blackbird*: "O blackbird, what a boy you are." Compare W. B. Yeats's "Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?"

I went to church, once (loud laughter)—this will sound funnier when I tell you that the only thing I remember is the long line of "Nows" that I counted. The repetition grew tiresome. I knew just when to expect a "Now", and I knew beforehand just

what the tone was going to be. There is no objection to repetition of the right kind,—only to the mechanical repetition of the tone. It is all right to repeat, if there is something for the voice to do. The vital thing, then, to consider is the sound effect.

So my advice to you boys in all composition work is: "Gather your sentences by ear, and re-imagine them in your writing."

Both Professor Erskine and Mr. Frost have brought us into immediate contact with the spirit of poetry. In this present mood it is interesting to note what the new poetry of America means. In an illuminating interview in the *New York Times* (March 26) Miss Amy Lowell ventures some explanations and distinctions that have a timely interest.

The thing that makes me feel sure that there is a future in the new poetry is the fact that those who write it follow so many different lines of thought. The new poetry is so large a subject that it can scarcely be covered by one definition. It seems to me that there are four definite sorts of new poetry, which I will attempt to describe.

One branch of the new poetry may be called the realistic school. This branch is descended partly from Whitman and partly from the prose writers of France and England. The leading exponents of it are Robert Frost and Edgar Lee Masters. These two poets are different from each other but they both are realists, they march under the same banner.

Another branch of the new poetry consists of the poets whose work shows a mixture of the highly imaginative and the realistic. Their thought verges on the purely imaginative, but is corrected by a scientific attitude of mind. I suppose that this particular movement in English poetry may be said to have started with Coleridge, but in England the movement hardly attained its due proportions. Half of literary England followed Wordsworth, half followed Byron. It is in America that we find the greatest disciple of Coleridge in the person of Edgar Allan Poe. The force of the movement then went back to France, where it showed clearly in Mallarmé and the later symbolists. Today we see this tendency somewhat popularized in Vachel Lindsay, although perhaps he does not know it. And if I may be so bold as to mention myself, I should say that I in common with most other imagists belong to this branch, that I am at once a fantasist and a realist.

Thirdly, we have the lyrico imaginative type of poet. Of this branch the best example that I can call to mind is John Gould Fletcher. The fourth group of the new poets consists of those who are descended straight from Matthew Arnold. They show the Wordsworth influence corrected by experience and education. Browning is in their line of descent. Characteristics of their work are high seriousness, astringency, and a certain pruning down of poetry so that redundancy is absolutely avoided. Of this type the most striking example is Edwin Arlington Robinson.

BOOKS RECEIVED

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